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1962/10/20

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October 20, 1962

I - AIR STRIKE SCENARIO

The Military Program

This plan calls for a surprise strike aimed at medium range missiles, surface to air missiles, and high performance aircraft and nuclear storage sites in Cuba. The object is to ensure by conventional means the most rapid and complete removal of any operational capability in these fields. This operation would be followed by continual close surveillance and very promptly by a blockade in which all Bloc shipping would be turned back and imports of fuel prohibited. The alternative of omitting the blockade is not recommended, because of the danger of a recreated threat. The alternative of a strike limited to known missile sites is no longer recommended even by those who first proposed it because of the dangers presented by a surviving and substantial air capability. This build-up should be hit promptly as a whole complex, or not at all.

Schedule of Public Statements

Intelligence estimates put a high premium on maximum tactical surprise, but political considerations at home and abroad dictate some minimum announcement that medium range missiles are being installed in Cuba. The current recommendation is that there should be a White House announcement of the estimates of the introduction of such missiles early Saturday evening. This statement would also announce that the President was recalling the Congress to a special session to meet on Tuesday morning. This announcement would be followed by a brief Presidential statement on all networks Sunday morning at the time the strike begins and the announcement presently would be completed by a Presidential TV address by mid-morning Sunday.

Notice to Khrushchev and Castro - Alternative 1

It is recommended that no advance notice be given to Khrushchev. The principal point here is that there is no notice to which he cannot make a politically damaging reply,

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"Declassified for Publication in
Foreign Relations of the United States"

Washington, D.C. - RG 230
OASD (C) A File; FRC 71A2896
Nitz File; Black Book,
Cuba, Vol I

14-458

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and no serious advantage in giving him any precise advance indication of a course which is inevitable. We have been unable to draft any advance warning which would carry conviction either in the following days of crises or in history.

There should, however, be a carefully drafted statement to Khrushchev delivered approximately simultaneously with the air strike. This message would carry much of the President's argument in his later public speech. It would carefully define and delimit the grounds and the extent of the military operation with special emphasis on its conventional character. It would renew and reemphasize the depth and intensity of the United States commitment to defend Berlin by all necessary means. It would include an urgent invitation to a Summit meeting. It might also include a statement that while we are currently treating these as Cuban missiles, any nuclear use of them would have to be regarded as an act of the Soviet Government.

The problem of notice to Castro is different. It is his country which will come under attack, and it is best from our point of view to focus responsibility on him. At some time between the White House statement on Saturday evening and the air strike a message should be delivered to the Cuban representative in the UN which would indicate plainly that what we now know is completely inconsistent with Cuban assurances, Soviet statements, and our own clearly announced position; thus it will now be necessary for us to take appropriate steps. The military preference is that warning to Cuba should be given not more than 2 hours before attack if tactical surprise is not to be jeopardized.

Notice to Khrushchev and Castro - Alternative 2

On the political side there is a strong feeling that a real advance communication to Khrushchev and Castro is needed, if the United States is not to be marked as a reckless aggressor and this Administration cursed forever as the force which opened the door to a world of catch-as-catch-can violence. In spite of the difficulty of saying anything that could not be turned against us, this group has urged that advance warning be given. If this is done, the military operation is degraded in the ways argued in the Annex, depending on whether 6 or 24 hours of notice is given.

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Such a warning could not be precise in its threat. Its basic sentence might be something saying that "unless the Soviet (Cuban) Government can give immediate and unequivocal assurance that these offensive weapons (missiles and IL-28s; MIGs?) will be removed immediately, the United States Government will have to meet its own responsibilities." The rest of the message would be, in essence, a preview of the President's speech.

If this sort of warning were given, it should be given simultaneously with or shortly after initial public statement. In that case the timing of the statement from the White House should be changed accordingly.

Notice to Friends

It appears to us essential that advance notice of this action be given to the heads of Governments of the following countries: The United Kingdom, France, Germany, Japan, Italy, and Turkey. The latter two are included because of the existence of nuclear forces on their territory. Notice should be given not more than 2 hours before the strike. The messages to our principal Allies should rehearse basic evidence and argumentation and the messages to Italy, Japan and Turkey, and also to Great Britain, should direct attention to the particular problem of United States-connected nuclear installations which may become a hazard. The United States should not indicate any fear on its own part, but should indicate a readiness to take account of the desires of its Allies in this grave situation. (If warning is given to Khrushchev, the content of these messages should be revised, and their timing advanced.)

On Sunday for Monday the United States would call a meeting of the Consultative Organ of the OAS and in that Organ it would press for a two-thirds majority endorsing this remedial action.

The United States would brief the North Atlantic Council on Monday, perhaps through a special emissary who may also be dispatched to De Gaulle. This briefing would emphasize the great provocation of the Soviet action, the increased determination of the United States, and the real balance of strategic power.

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CH-460